VI.

SIAM AND THE MALAY PENINSULA.

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IN his interesting paper on "The Nāgarakretāgama List of Countries on the Indo-Chinese Mainland,"[1] Colonel Gerini objects, reasonably enough, to the claim set up by the Javanese author of the Nāgara Kṛĕtāgama that the states of Kĕdah, Kĕlantan, Trĕngganu, and Pahang in the Malay Peninsula and the island of Singapore at the south of it were dependencies of the Javanese empire of Majapahit. This alleged Javanese supremacy over the Peninsula cannot, in view of the known facts of Malay history, have been much more than a mere pretension, never substantiated by any real effective occupation. The claim was no doubt made under the influence of the stirring events which in or about the year 1377 A.D. culminated in a great, though transient, expansion of the Javanese sway. Palembang, Jambi, Pasei, and Samudra (in Sumatra), Ujong Tanah (the "Land's End" of the Malay Peninsula, now known as Johor), Bangka, Bĕlitung, Riau, Lingga, Bentan, and a number of other small islands in this region, as well as certain points on the coast of Borneo and other places to the eastward, are in the Pasei Chronicle recorded as having been conquered by Majapahit at this period or as being tributary to it about this time.

There is little doubt that this was the conquest recorded in the Malay Annals (the Sĕjarah Malayu), which expelled the ruling Malay dynasty from Singapore and led to the foundation of the new settlement of Malacca. The Javanese do not appear to have kept Singapore, for we hear of no

[1] J.R.A.S., July, 1905.

Javanese settlement being made there; the place simply lapses into insignificance as an unimportant dependency of Malacca.

But so far as the Peninsula itself is concerned, there is no evidence that there was ever any real conquest by the Javanese or any lasting relation of subjection to Majapahit.

In place of this Javanese claim, Colonel Gerini would set up a Siamese occupation of the Peninsula, asserting that "all that territory then belonged unquestionably to Siam, and continued to do so until the advent of the Portuguese at Malacca." Similarly, in his very interesting article on Siamese Proverbs in the Journal of the Siam Society for 1904, he says[1] that "the whole of the Malay Peninsula was under Siamese sway for the two hundred and fifty years comprised between the middle of the thirteenth and the end of the fifteenth century A.D., during which period many Siamese customs, institutions, etc., were introduced to the Malay people."

Malay history is an obscure subject and hardly, perhaps, of very general interest, but in view of Colonel Gerini's recognized position as an authority on matters relating to the history of South-Eastern Asia, it is impossible to pass over in silence assertions such as these, which are contrary to ascertained facts and in the highest degree misleading.[2] This is the more necessary as Colonel Gerini is not altogether alone in making such assertions. For some centuries past the Siamese have exercised a somewhat ill-defined suzerainty over certain of the northern states of the Peninsula; and in support of this traditional suzerainty (which they often tried to convert into something more substantial) they sometimes roundly claimed that the Peninsula belonged *de jure* to them. But they never, so far as I am aware, adduced any evidence of such an actual occupation as Colonel Gerini asserts; nor does the latter

[1] p. 27 (p. 17 of the article).

[2] I need hardly say that I do not for a moment impute to Colonel Gerini any intention to mislead; but he appears to be so much influenced by the Siamese point of view that he sees Malay history through a distorting medium.

bring forward any evidence that is conclusive on the point. While he denies the supremacy claimed for Majapahit (wherein he has the facts of history on his side), and will not even admit so much as an ephemeral conquest of these territories by the Javanese (which indeed, except as to Singapore and its immediate neighbourhood, is unlikely), he attempts to base his assertion of a Siamese occupation of the Peninsula on certain warlike expeditions, beginning about A.D. 1279–80, of the Sukothai king Ruang, who is said to have conquered the Peninsula at that remote period.

I propose to consider this alleged Siamese occupation of the Peninsula in the light of Malay history. But first of all, in order to avoid ambiguity, I would say that when I speak of the Malay Peninsula I do not (like some other writers, including Colonel Gerini) include in the term the whole territory which lies between Tenasserim and Singapore. As a matter of physical geography, the Peninsula begins about lat. 7° 30′, where it joins the long isthmus which connects it with the mainland of Indo-China. But that is a mere matter of technical terminology, whereas the distinction I wish to draw is of substantial importance.

The Malay Peninsula, in the sense in which I use the expression here, comprises that part only of this long tongue of land where for centuries past the bulk of the settled population has been of Malay race and speech and of the Muhammadan religion. In that sense the Malay Peninsula begins about lat. 7°.[1] A few generations ago the ethnical frontier was on the whole somewhat to the north of that parallel,[2] but during the last two centuries it has shifted slowly southward. It is said that Sĕnggora (lat. 7° 12′) was once a Malay town; if that was so, it must have been a very long time ago, for now the place is mainly Siamese, in so far as it is not Chinese.[3] Even to the south of lat. 7°

[1] Apparently rather to the north of this parallel on the west coast of the Peninsula, and to the south of it in the districts further east.

[2] See Newbold, "Straits of Malacca," vol. ii, pp. 2, 67.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 71–3; Annandale & Robinson, Fasciculi Malayenses, Supplement, p. xii.

there are at the present day a few small patches where Siamese constitute the bulk of the settled population, but, roughly speaking, the ethnical boundary may be taken to be about lat. 7°. Here Siamese territory, in the true sense of the word, borders on two historic Malay states: Kĕdah, which still survives as a tributary state, and Patani, which, like Kĕdah, was ravaged by the Siamese some seventy years ago, and, less fortunate than its neighbour, has been broken up by the invaders into a number of small fragments, over most of which weak Malay rulers are allowed to exercise a nominal sway under the suzerainty of the Siamese King and the supervision of a Siamese High Commissioner. But broken or whole, with diminished boundaries and in a position of dependence though they may be, Kĕdah and Patani have for centuries been essentially Malay states, the circumstance of their being officially styled Siamese provinces and having strange Siamese names conferred upon them notwithstanding. They have their place in Malay history, and by their speech, race, and faith they are unmistakably alien to the Siamese. There are relatively few Siamese elements in their population,[1] and those have probably only come in during the last few generations. Further to the south, in the remaining states of the Peninsula such as Kĕlantan, Trĕngganu, Perak, and Pahang (to say nothing of Sĕlangor, the Nĕgri Sĕmbilan, and Johor), there are no Siamese worth mentioning, and there is no evidence that there ever were any.

To return to the alleged Siamese sway over the Peninsula from *circâ* A.D. 1250 to 1511, I would observe that it is in terms contradicted by some of Colonel Gerini's own authorities, viz., the Chinese works known as the Ying-yai Shêng-lan (of 1416), the Hai-yü (of 1537), and the History of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1643), Book 325.[2] These authorities expressly state that in the year 1403 the Chinese

[1] See Fasciculi Malayenses, Supplement, p. xxii, for the census figures showing the Malay preponderance in the Patani states. (No figures are given for Kĕdah, which is even more Malay.) In Ligor, Patalung, and Sĕnggora, on the other hand, the Siamese preponderance is marked.

[2] Groeneveldt in "Miscellaneous Papers relating to Indo-China," 2nd series, vol. i, pp. 243 *et seq.*

emperor sent an embassy to Malacca; that Malacca returned the compliment in 1405, on which occasion the Chinese emperor invested the local chief with regalia and appointed him king of the country; likewise that in 1409 another Chinese embassy again recognized the independent status of Malacca.[1] In 1419, and again in 1431, Malacca complained to the Court of China that Siam was planning an attack against her, and the Emperor forbade the Siamese King from carrying out his supposed intention, and on the second occasion issued a decree that he should live in harmony with his neighbours and refrain from acting against the orders of the Imperial Court. So say the Chinese records; but it is to be feared that these paternal admonitions had little effect on the Siamese, who repeatedly made war on Malacca in spite of the Emperor's orders.

Now of course it is open to argument whether the Emperor of China had any sort of jurisdiction or *locus standi* to interfere between Siam and Malacca at all, even if Siam stood (as it is generally believed to have done) in some sort of dependent relation towards the Celestial throne. But it is surely perfectly obvious that China could not have solemnly recognized the independence of Malacca and invested its ruler as king, if the place had been at that time actually in Siamese occupation. Thus these Chinese authorities, which, it must be remembered, are matter of fact documents, some of them official records and contemporary with the events they relate, suffice to knock rather more than a century off the alleged two and a half centuries of Siamese sway over the Peninsula.

It is true that these same records state that "formerly" Malacca was not a kingdom, but was a mere chieftainship tributary to Siam, the Hai-yü adding that the chief who was in charge of the country had revolted against his master and

[1] This independence is of course considered by the Chinese chroniclers as being subject to the general overriding suzerainty then claimed by China over the whole of Eastern Asia. It is really comical to read of Java, Siam, and China all almost at the same time claiming supremacy over the Peninsula, while in fact none of them had any actual footing there. These rival claims (even if we did not know their hollowness *aliunde*) are enough to destroy one another.

made himself independent at some period which could not (in 1537) be ascertained.[1] I will return to that point hereafter; but in the meantime I would emphasize the fact that during the whole of the fifteenth century Malacca, the leading state of the Peninsula, was an independent Malay kingdom, recognized as such by the Chinese Imperial authorities, and was often at war with Siam, but in no sense under Siamese sway. The King and people were Muhammadans; they had their own laws,[2] their own administrative system, their own language and customs; in fact, with the exception of that tincture of Indian civilization which is shared by most of the civilized races of Further India, they had nothing whatever in common with Siam. During the whole of this period they maintained, at frequent intervals, diplomatic relations with China by the sending and receiving of embassies, which were openly accorded official recognition. It is quite certain that from the year 1405, when China, then beyond all question the leading power in Eastern Asia, recognized the claims of Malacca, its independence was *de facto* maintained till 1511, when the place fell into the hands of the Portuguese.

This state of things is in all essentials confirmed by the evidence of the Commentaries of Alboquerque[3] and by the Malay Annals (the Sĕjarah Malayu).[4] The former work no doubt merely embodies the oral traditions current about the time of the Portuguese conquest; the latter, though probably based in part on earlier written sources, was not itself

[1] The account in the History of the Ming Dynasty might be taken to mean that Malacca was tributary to Siam up to the year 1403, and renounced its allegiance at the suggestion of the Chinese envoy. But this hardly seems consistent with the conservative tendencies of Chinese policy, and is therefore improbable. If it was, however, the fact, it goes to show that the Siamese supremacy was of a very nominal character, seeing that it could be thrown off so easily. There can have been no real sway, no actual Siamese occupation, but a mere paper suzerainty at the most.

[2] A translation of the laws of Malacca will be found in Newbold, *op. cit.*, vol. ii, p. 231 *et seq.*

[3] Translated by W. de G. Birch in the Hakluyt Society's publications. See especially vol. iii, pp. 71–84.

[4] Partly translated by John Leyden under the title "Malay Annals." The best edition in Malay is that of Singapore (1896, ed. Shellabear).

composed till A.D. 1612. Both are therefore inferior as authorities to the earlier Chinese records. But where they agree with these records, their value as independent corroborative evidence is not to be denied. It is pretty clear from a comparison of these sources, as I tried to show some years ago,[1] that the usually received Malay chronology is incorrect and must be cut down considerably. But it is also evident that some five or six of the Malay *rajas* of Malacca, whose conquests and other exploits are related in the Sějarah Malayu, are perfectly historical personages, even though their Malay chronicler has woven some legendary lore into his history of their lives. They really lived and reigned in the fifteenth century. They conquered neighbouring states, such as Pahang, Siak, Kampar, and Indragiri (these last three in Sumatra), squabbled with Palembang (another Sumatran state),[2] were in diplomatic relations with Majapahit and China, and were several times at open feud with Siam. They came near to welding the whole Peninsula, as far as Kědah and Patani inclusive, into a Malay empire, and but for their conquest by the Portuguese it is possible that they might have succeeded in doing so. Anyhow, a few years before the Portuguese conquest, they defeated a Siamese fleet which had been sent to attack them.

One may well ask, what is there, so far as the fifteenth century is concerned, to show for the alleged Siamese sway over the Peninsula, seeing that its leading state at this time enjoyed such a perfectly autonomous position?

Perhaps, however, it may be suggested that even if Malacca was independent from 1405 onwards, it may have been in Siamese hands some twenty-five years earlier, at the time when the Nāgara Krĕtāgama was written. If that be so, I should like to have it explained how, in such a short space of time, the Siamese so completely lost their hold over

[1] Actes du Onzième Congrès International des Orientalistes, ii, pp. 239–253.

[2] See Groeneveldt, *op. cit.*, p. 163. At some time between 1408 and 1415 the King of Malacca appears to have raised a claim to sovereignty over Palembang, which place seems to have been still under Javanese supremacy, and there was a suggestion that this claim was put forward with the sanction of China; but this was formally repudiated by the Chinese emperor.

this region. But what evidence is there that it was really Siamese in 1380, any more than in 1405 or 1500? According to the Sějarah Malayu, Malacca was founded in consequence of and soon after the destruction of Singapore by the forces of Majapahit. This event, I believe, I was the first to date at about the year 1377,[1] and I am glad to observe that Colonel Gerini agrees with me: it avoids the necessity of restating here the grounds which led me to that conclusion. I suppose, therefore, that I shall not be far wrong in assuming the foundation of Malacca to have been approximately synchronous with the writing of the Nāgara Krĕtāgama, which apparently contains no mention of the new settlement. The Malay chronicler tells us nothing very definite as to the condition of the Peninsula at the time of its foundation, except that Muhammadanism had not yet become the established religion of the country. The conversion of the ruling dynasty to Islam must, however, have happened a few years later, as the Chinese embassy of 1409 found that religion established.

According to Colonel Gerini's contention, we are to believe, it seems, that in 1380 or thereabouts the Peninsula was held by the Siamese, who were good enough to acquiesce in the establishment of a new Malay state in their midst, and who in the space of a single generation had so completely effaced themselves that not a trace of them remained. This strikes me as being in the highest degree improbable.

My data do not enable me to pursue the alleged Siamese occupation of the Peninsula further back into the dim past; but I have not the slightest hesitation in asserting that if the conquest of the Peninsula in 1279-80 by King Ruang really took place—if, that is to say, that warlike monarch or his army ever got further south than Ligor or Sĕnggora—the exploit was a mere episode which left no permanent traces. What, in fact, are the Siamese customs, institutions, etc., that during this supposed period of Siamese occupation

[1] Actes du Onzième Congrès International des Orientalistes, ii, pp. 250–1.

were introduced among the Malays? I know of no single specifically Tai (or Thai) characteristic among the Malays or any of the other indigenous inhabitants of the Peninsula, as defined above. This is the more remarkable as there is plenty of evidence in the Peninsula of a former Indo-Chinese domination, as I shall state presently, but it is not Siamese at all. One would, however, like to have fuller and better particulars as to the expeditions of King Ruang, and I trust that Colonel Gerini will be good enough to supply them.

It will be objected to my arguments that the authorities I have referred to expressly state that Siam "formerly" owned the Peninsula, and that local legends and traditions ascribe to the Siamese a number of ancient forts, mines, and other striking landmarks, the real origin of which is lost in antiquity. Further, it may be pointed out that the Siamese suzerainty over the northern states of the Peninsula has been acknowledged for several centuries by the Malay rulers sending periodical tribute in the form of 'golden flowers' (*bunga ĕmas*) to the Court of Siam.

I will deal with this last point first. It seems to me entirely irrelevant to the issue here raised. The northern states of the Peninsula have for centuries past had good and sufficient reasons for desiring to propitiate their powerful neighbour. To them the King of Siam and his viceroy of Ligor were ever a dangerous menace, and it needs no hypothesis of conquest or occupation to explain the attitude which the Malay *rajas* adopted. During the early part of the last century gallons of ink were spilt in learned dissertations as to the precise rights of the King of Siam over these Malay feudatories, vassals, or subordinate allies of his. I do not propose to revive these extinct controversies, for they can have no bearing on the purely historical question of the relation of Siam to the Malay Peninsula in medieval times. I would only observe that, until a comparatively recent period, the Siamese overlordship (whatever its theoretical rights may have been) remained in fact a purely external suzerainty: these Malay states were left to enjoy autonomy so long as they sent their periodical tribute of golden flowers

with reasonable punctuality. Such as it was, this homage was confined to the four northern states of the Peninsula, Kĕdah, Patani, Kĕlantan, and Trĕngganu; the others, which are now under British protection or suzerainty, had, as a rule, no dealings with Siam at all.

The other argument at first sight seems much stronger: we have all the authorities, Chinese, Portuguese, Malay (and, I suppose, Siamese), alleging or admitting that in some far distant past Siam had held the Peninsula. Well, is it quite certain that 'Siam' and 'the Siamese' are, in this instance, convertible terms? The people we call Siamese do not apply that name to themselves, but call themselves Thai, and are a branch of the Tai race. Long before they came down from their original seats in Southern China, the country which they were eventually to occupy already bore the name of Siam. This country, the valley of the Me-nam, had (as Colonel Gerini has shown us elsewhere[1]) a long history prior to its conquest by the Tai race. For the first ten centuries or more of our era it was inhabited by a race allied to the Mon people of Pegu and the Khmer people of Camboja. Now of the influence of this race there are in the Malay Peninsula abundant traces. The dialects of the remnants of the wild aboriginal tribes that have escaped absorption by the more civilized Malay population are not merely distantly related to the languages of the Peguans and Cambojans, but also in certain parts of the Peninsula exhibit traces of direct contact with some such Indo-Chinese race. Thus in certain portions of the Peninsula[2] the numerals used by these rude tribes are nearly identical with the Mon numerals. Now it is quite certain that there has been no possibility of recent contact between the Mons and these wild tribes; since the time when the Malays colonized the Peninsula and the Siamese occupied the isthmus leading to it, these tribes have been completely cut off from all relations

[1] See his contributions to the *Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review* in the years 1900–1902.

[2] Southern Sĕlangor, North-Eastern Pahang, the Nĕgri Sĕmbilan, and Northern Johor.

with the Mon and Khmer peoples. But, on the other hand, their numerals have diverged so slightly from the Mon type that there must have been direct contact at a period which in the history of human development cannot be styled remote.[1] I think one would not be far wrong in suggesting that it was something less than a thousand years ago.

Here, then, we have real evidence of the former presence of a strong Indo-Chinese element in the Peninsula; but it is not Siamese in our sense of the word at all, that is to say, it is not Thai or Tai. It is Siamese in the old sense, viz., that it probably proceeded from the country which bears that name; but of Thai (or Tai) influence there is not a trace to be found.

These are some of the grounds on which, until better evidence is adduced, I venture to doubt the reality of any such early Siamese occupation of the Peninsula as Colonel Gerini alleges. The early history of this region is somewhat of a mystery, but it would appear that, before the Malays colonized it, it was in part occupied by a Mon-Khmer race, who probably held a few points on the coast. Then, somewhere about the eleventh or twelfth century perhaps, these remote possessions were given up, probably because the home country of these Indo-Chinese settlers was in the throes of war and in course of being conquered by the invading Thai race. When, after a prolonged series of struggles, the latter had made themselves masters of Siam, it is quite possible that they took stock of what they had conquered, and endeavoured to claim for themselves all the territories that had formerly been occupied by the race they had overcome: it is a familiar principle, applied a few years ago against Siam

[1] Compare the forms of these numerals:—

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Southern Sakai (Malay Peninsula)	mui	'mbār	'mpe'	ĕmpun	masokn	pĕrū'	tempo
Mon (written) ...	mwai	mbā	pi	pan	măsun	tărau	thăpah
Mon (spoken) ...	mūă	mbā	pĭ *or* pâi	pân *or* pon	m'sōn *or* p'sōn	t'rau *or* k'rau	th'pâh *or* kh'pâh.

It is obvious that in some cases the modern forms in the aboriginal dialects of the Peninsula are more archaic than the modern Mon speech itself.

by the French, when they claimed all the tributary states over which the empire of Annam had formerly exercised suzerainty. But in the meantime the Peninsula had been colonized by the Malays from Sumatra, and Siam did not succeed in wresting it from its new rulers. That is my reading of the history of this region: a hollow claim to supremacy by the Siamese, founded not on their own conquests or actual occupation, but on the earlier settlements of the Mon-Khmer race whose country they had taken; a failure to make good these pretensions; and a series of raids and aggressions on the small Malayan states: that is a brief summary of the relations of Siam to the Peninsula in medieval times; and that, I take it, is why the Peninsula is rightly called the Malay Peninsula, although at the present day Siam is politically suzerain over the northern third of it.[1]

For the rest, though venturing to differ entirely from Colonel Gerini's interpretation of history, I may perhaps be allowed to add that his identification of the Nāgara Krĕtāgama names of countries appears to me to be unimpeachable. With regard to the doubt which he throws on the antiquity of the name of Kĕdah, I would observe that this state is mentioned under that name in the Sĕjarah Malayu as obtaining regalia by investiture from the King of Malacca.[2] That is not, of course, very conclusive, as this event is related of a period just preceding the Portuguese conquest, but, after all, Kĕdah may very well be the old native name of the country and Langkasuka its literary name. Many places in Further India and the islands bear two names: thus, Pegu was styled Haṃsāwatī, Tumasik was called Singapura; similarly Siak (in Sumatra) is known

[1] The rest is under British overlordship. The Peninsula, having never achieved political unity, suffers from the want of a convenient proper name. "Golden Chersonesus" and "Malay Peninsula" are clumsy descriptions. "Malacca" was (and to some extent still is) used by Continental authorities as a name for the Peninsula, but has not found favour with English writers, and sounds rather absurd locally because the town to which the name really belongs has lost all its old political and commercial importance.

[2] Leyden's "Malay Annals," pp. 321–3; "Sĕjarah Malayu" (ed. 1896), pp. ۲۸۷, ۲۸۸.

as Sĕri Indrapura, and many other such instances could be given. All this merely illustrates the varnish of Indian culture which spread over these regions during the first dozen centuries or so of our era. Sometimes the native name alone has survived, sometimes the Indian one, occasionally both.[1]

I do not propose in this place to criticize in detail the etymologies which Colonel Gerini suggests for some of the older local names: some of them seem to me of a rather speculative character. But it is worth mention that Langka-suka still lives in the memory of the local Malays. It has developed into a myth, being evidently the 'spirit-land' referred to as Lakân Suka ('Lakawn Suka') by the peasantry of the Patani states and the realm of Alang-ka-suka, interpreted by a curious folk-etymology as the 'country of what you will,'[2] a sort of fairy-land where the Kĕdah Malays locate the fairy princess Sadong, who rules over the Little People and the wild goats of the limestone hills, and persistently refuses all suitors, be they never so high-born or otherwise eligible.[3]

I trust that these observations, made in no spirit of carping criticism, but with the genuine desire that the history of the Malay Peninsula may be set in a true light, may lead the able author from whom I have ventured on some points to differ, to contribute additional evidence in support of his own point of view, and thus further elucidate the obscure past of this somewhat neglected region.

[1] Little weight can be attached to the statement in the Marong Mahawangsa on which Colonel Gerini relies. That work is one of the least satisfactory of Malay chronicles, being indeed little more than a collection of fairy tales.

[2] As my friend Mr. R. J. Wilkinson has pointed out to me, the name should, if it is to fit this fictitious etymology, be pronounced Alang-kah-suka.

[3] See Fasciculi Malayenses, pt. ii (*a*), pp. 25–6; and Skeat, "Fables and Folk Tales from an Eastern Forest," pp. 49–51, 81.